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Author(s): STUART ANDERSON

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RACIAL ANGLO-SAXONISM AND THE AMERICAN RESPONSE TO THE BOER WAR

STUART ANDERSON

On 11 October 1899, Great Britain's long quarrel with the Boers in South Africa erupted into open warfare as Boer forces struck southeast into Natal and west into Bechuanaland. For the next several months, the British position was dismal. The ill-prepared and poorly officered British troops in South Africa suffered a series of humiliating defeats. The Boers cut the Cape-Rhodesia rail line, laid siege to the garrisons at Kimberley, Mafeking, and Ladysmith, and invaded Cape Colony. Britain rushed reinforcements to South Africa, but until February 1900, all the fighting was in the territory of the British colonies.

A much more serious threat than the early Boer successes, however, was the explosion of anti-British feeling on the Continent. Most Europeans lauded the Boers as heroic freedom-fighters. Russia, ever watchful to extend its influence at the expense of Britain, sought a coalition with France and Germany to take advantage of the British preoccupation with South Africa.[1] Some people in Britain, remembering that a colonial war and European intervention had brought down the first British Empire, feared that history might repeat itself.

Most serious was the fact that the Boer War provided a stiff test for the diplomatic rapprochement that had occurred recently between Great Britain and the United States. The settlement of the Venezuela boundary

[1]The Foreign Office learned in October 1899 that Count Mikhail Muraviev, the Russian foreign minister, was sounding out the French and Germans about a coalition. On that occasion, Muraviev failed to convince French Foreign Minister Théophile Declassé of the wisdom of such a course. In March 1900 the kaiser told the Prince of Wales that Muraviev had again approached France and Germany. France was willing this time if Germany would go along, but the kaiser declined. On European diplomacy and the Boer War, see William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890–1902,* 2 vols. (New York and London, 1935), 2: chap. 20.

dispute in 1896 and Great Britain's warm support for the United States during the Spanish-American War had brought the two countries closer together than they had been at any time since before the American Revolution; and as the nineteenth century neared its end, there was real hope that patient diplomacy, combined with the social, cultural, and economic links between Britain and the United States, might bring about an enduring Anglo-American understanding.[2] The outbreak of the South African war threatened to end that hope. Most Americans sympathized almost instinctively with the Boers in their uneven contest with the mighty British Empire. They blamed the British for the war and condemned them as bullies and gold-hungry land-grabbers. Arthur Lee, who had served as British military observer with the Rough Riders a year and a half before, and, like most Britons, had cheered American victories, observed in January 1900: "The gratitude for our support during the Spanish difficulty seems sadly evanescent in certain quarters."[3] Congress and the public were overwhelmingly pro-Boer, and this gave hope to Boer agents in their repeated attempts to secure American assistance in mediating an end to the war that would secure full independence for the two Boer republics. Such interference in the conflict by the United States could easily have disrupted the gradually developing Anglo-American rapprochement and allowed the two countries to slip back into the old resentment and distrust.

Yet, remarkably, the policy of the United States government throughout the war was one of unabashed sympathy with Great Britain.[4] Ambassador Julian Pauncefote, writing to Prime Minister Lord Salisbury in mid-January 1900, reported: "The warmth & friendliness of manner shown towards me by the President & all his cabinet is very marked, & evidently intended to show their desire to maintain & promote the entente cordiale & the 'unwritten Treaty' which undoubtedly exists in spite of the outcry about the word 'alliance.'"[5] During the war, American diplomats looked after

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[2]There are several excellent studies of the turn-of-the-century rapprochement, including Lionel M. Gelber, *The Rise of Anglo-American Friendship: A Study in World Politics, 1898–1906* (London, 1938); Charles S. Campbell, Jr., *Anglo-American Understanding, 1898–1903* (Baltimore, 1957); A. E. Campbell, *Great Britain and the United States, 1895–1903* (London, 1960); R. G. Neale, *Great Britain and United States Expansion: 1898–1900* (East Lansing, Mich., 1966); and Bradford Perkins, *The Great Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1895–1914* (New York, 1968).

[3]Lee to Theodore Roosevelt, 29 January 1900, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Roosevelt Papers). Lee was Roosevelt's tent mate during the Cuban campaign.

[4]The only published scholarly account is John H. Ferguson, *American Diplomacy and the Boer War* (Philadelphia, 1939). Elizabeth Zeil, "The United States and the Boer War" (M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1950), adds very little. On Anglo-American relations and the war, see also Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding,* chap. 8; and Perkins, *Great Rapprochement,* pp. 89–97.

[5]Pauncefote to Salisbury, 19 January 1900, quoted in Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding,* pp. 171–72. Joseph Chamberlain, Britain's secretary of state for the colonies,

British interests and the welfare of British prisoners of war in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. American bankers floated loans that paid roughly 20 percent of Britain's war costs. The government allowed all but the most obviously military goods to be exported—an arrangement of considerable benefit to Britain, which controlled the seas. On the occasions when Americans tried to ship goods to the Boers, Washington's protests over British violations of neutral rights were decidedly low-key. Most important, the United States government gave Boer envoys very cool receptions and refused to pursue the idea of mediation. In fact, in March of 1900, Secretary of State John Hay purposely forestalled an anticipated mediation effort by the Continental powers by giving Salisbury an opportunity to reject it in advance. "For the present we seem to have spiked their guns," Hay told Henry White, first secretary at the American embassy in London.[6] American policy throughout the war was so favorable to Great Britain that Secretary Hay repeatedly had to deny charges that a "secret alliance" existed between the two countries. John H. Ferguson, the historian who gave the most attention to American diplomacy and the South African war, flatly accused the United States of "assuring the annihilation of the Boer republics."[7]

Historians have offered a variety of explanations for the pro-British policy of the United States government: repayment for Britain's benevolence in 1898; the personal bias of John Hay; the desire to use the friendship to extort British concessions in negotiations for a new Central American canal treaty and for a treaty on the Alaska boundary; the profitable wartime trade; a healthy respect for British power and an

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had created a stir in the United States when, in a speech at Leicester on 30 November 1899, he used the word "alliance" to describe the relationship between "the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race," Great Britain and the United States. The speech was printed in *Times* (London), 1 December 1899, p. 7. For an explanation of Chamberlain's unfortunate choice of words, see " 'Entangling Alliances,' " *Spectator* 83 (December 1899): 865–66.

[6]Hay to White, 18 March 1900, Henry White Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as White Papers). On this episode, see Ferguson, *American Diplomacy and the Boer War,* pp. 138–42; and Perkins, *Great Rapprochement,* p. 96.

[7]Ferguson, *American Diplomacy and the Boer War,* p. ix. Weeks before the war began, Ohio Democrats charged that the McKinley administration had concluded a secret alliance with Great Britain. Hay denied the charge in a letter to the chairman of the Ohio Republican Party. Hay to Charles Dick, 11 September 1899, John Hay Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as Hay Papers). On 19 February 1900 the House of Representatives asked Hay to confirm or deny the existence of a secret pact. Hay, in offering his denial, pointed out that a secret alliance was impossible under the American Constitution. See *House Documents,* 56th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 458 (Serial 3988), pp. 1–2. Rumors continued to circulate, however, and Hay had to deny the charge again in a letter to Senator James McMillan of Michigan, 3 July 1900. Hay Papers. Still, the Democratic platform of 1900 denounced "the ill-concealed Republican alliance with England."

appreciation of the value to the United States of continued British friendship; recognition that the Boers had oppressed British settlers (the "Uitlanders") in their republics and helped bring the war on themselves; concern lest a British disaster tilt the world balance of power against the United States; and unwillingness to condemn a British colonial war while Americans were fighting one of their own in the Philippines.[8]

At one time or another, all these considerations may have influenced the thinking of American policymakers and the pro-British minority that provided important public support for the government's course of action. But there was another consideration that was seldom absent from American discussion of the war and certainly exercised considerable influence on American policy: "Anglo-Saxonism." A belief in the innate superiority of the "Anglo-Saxon race" was part of the prevailing orthodoxy in both Great Britain and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Articulate Englishmen and Americans at all levels of society declaimed about the supposed racial affinity of their two countries and described Great Britain and the United States as natural allies because of the racial bond.[9] Many Americans, being thoroughly imbued with such ideas, came to believe during the Boer War that a British victory was essential to the prestige and influence of the Anglo-Saxon race; that it would be a good thing for Anglo-Saxons, for the Boers, and for the world at large if the British controlled the agricultural and mineral riches of South Africa; and that the Boers, while wonderfully brave, were a crude and inert people and an impediment to the advance of "civilization" as represented by Anglo-Saxon Britain. It will be the purpose of this essay to explore the Anglo-Saxonist beliefs of such Americans, especially powerful and influential individuals such as John Hay, Theodore Roosevelt, and Alfred Thayer Mahan, and to assess the impact of Anglo-Saxonism on American policy during the Boer War.

Just six days after the Boers initiated hostilities, Cecil Spring Rice, then attached to the British legation at Tehran, sat down to write an unhappy letter to his friend Theodore Roosevelt. "If I were not an

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[8]Ferguson, *American Diplomacy and the Boer War,* pp. 122–23, 176, passim; Campbell, *Anglo-American Understanding,* pp. 179–81; Perkins, *Great Rapprochement,* p. 93; Zeil, "United States and the Boer War," passim.

[9]Although racial Anglo-Saxonism was a pervasive element in British and American thought, there is no published study dealing specifically with Anglo-Saxonism as an intellectual assumption in either country. On Anglo-Saxonist ideas in Britain, however, much material may be found in L. P. Curtis, Jr., *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, Conn., 1968). There is valuable information on American Anglo-Saxonism in Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas, 1963). See also Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought,* rev. ed. (Boston, 1955), pp. 170–92, passim; and John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925,* rev. ed. (New Brunswick, N.J., 1963), passim. Perhaps the most comprehensive study of American Anglo-Saxonism is Helen E. Knuth, "The Climax of American Anglo-Saxonism, 1898–1905" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1958).

Englishman," he wrote, "I should certainly sympathize with the Boers—and we can't possibly complain of people doing it. But viewed impartially it would be a better thing that S. Africa should be Anglo-Saxon than Dutch[,] and I have learnt that from you[,] Dutchman as you are."[10]

Spring Rice was at least partly justified in naming Roosevelt as the source of his "impartial" view of the Boer War. As early as 1896, while still a police commissioner in New York City, Roosevelt had predicted serious trouble in South Africa and voiced an opinion on what the outcome should be. He told Henry White that he had great admiration for the Boers, but felt it was "to the interest of civilization that the English-speaking race should be dominant in South Africa, exactly as it is for the interest of civilization that the United States themselves, the greatest branch of the English-speaking race, should be dominant in the Western Hemisphere."[11] In the opinion of Roosevelt and those who thought like him, any extension of Anglo-Saxon rule was by definition a gain for humanity. It was this assumption that shaped Roosevelt's response to the outbreak of the Boer War. Replying to Spring Rice's letter, he said that the Boers had "many fine traits," an arguable cause, and a sympathetic audience in the United States. But in the end, the Boers would have to accept British rule, since "it would be for the advantage of mankind to have English spoken south of the Zambesi."[12]

John Hay, the most thoroughly partisan supporter of Britain in the American government, shared Roosevelt's opinion that the British, as the representatives of a superior race, were fighting the battle of civilization and progress in South Africa. Hay's beliefs were of particular significance because President McKinley left the formulation of American policy toward the war almost entirely in the hands of his secretary of state.[13] While ambassador at London prior to coming to the State Department, Hay had

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[10]Spring Rice to Roosevelt, 17 October 1899, Roosevelt Papers.

[11]Roosevelt to White, 30 March 1896, Elting E. Morison, ed., *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt,* 8 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1951–54), 1:523 (hereafter cited as *Roosevelt Letters*).

[12]Roosevelt to Spring Rice, 2 December 1899, Stephen Gwynn, ed., *The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice,* 2 vols. (Boston and New York, 1929), 1:305 (hereafter cited as *Spring Rice Letters*). See also Howard K. Beale, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Rise of America to World Power* (Baltimore, 1956), pp. 99–100; and Roosevelt to F. C. Selous, 7 February 1900: "I am . . . a believer in the fact that it is for the good of the world that the English-speaking race in all its branches should hold as much of the world's surface as possible." *Roosevelt Letters,* 2:1176–77. Roosevelt was one of America's most thorough-going Anglo-Saxonists, as virtually all students of his life and his foreign policy achievements have pointed out. A broad account of Roosevelt's thinking on the subject of race is Thomas G. Dyer, "Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1975).

[13]This fact is itself the best evidence of McKinley's own pro-British sentiments. H. Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, 1963), pp. 460–61, points out one or two instances in which McKinley betrayed his partisanship. However, because of McKinley's habit of concealing his inner thoughts, there is no indication in his personal papers of what may have motivated him to favor the British.

made the acquaintance of Cecil Rhodes and heard him describe his dream of extending British rule throughout South Africa. Hay was won over immediately to Rhodes's ideas.[14] His actions during the Boer War make clear his determination that the Boers, for whom he had only aristocratic contempt, should not stand in the way of Anglo-Saxon expansion. Shortly before the war broke out, Hay told Henry White that he hoped the British would "make quick work" of the Boers. Six months later, Hay told White he was convinced "that the fight of England in South Africa is the fight of civilization and progress." He was convinced too that "most men of sense" in the United States shared his view.[15]

Perhaps not "most men of sense" agreed with Hay, but a substantial number of them did. Harvard engineering professor and former naval officer I. N. Hollis told a meeting of Canadian and American civil engineers that the British cause was "the cause of the Anglo-Saxon race, which stands to me as the great bulwark of civilization and freedom." James Ford Rhodes, one of America's most honored historians, agreed. George F. Becker, a respected geologist and an expert on the South African gold fields, announced that the British were "fighting to obtain for British subjects in the Transvaal . . . liberty to be civilized after the manner of Anglo-Saxons."[16] Whitelaw Reid, editor of the nation's leading Republican journal, the *New York Tribune,* committed his considerable talents to convincing Americans that a British victory would be "best for the security of personal rights, for the ordered liberty and the advancing civilization of the world."[17] Reid's efforts early in the war drew a pleased response from Alfred Thayer Mahan, the famous intellectual patron of navalism, who thanked the editor "for keeping before our public that there is a British as

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[14]John Hays Hammond, *Autobiography,* 2 vols. (New York, 1935), 2:446–47. Hammond was an American mining engineer who had served as Rhodes's undercover agent in Johannesburg and had been jailed in the wake of the Jameson raid in 1896. He introduced Hay to Rhodes. See also Perkins, *Great Rapprochement,* p. 90; and Kenton J. Clymer, *John Hay: The Gentleman as Diplomat* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1975), p. 157. On Hay's extreme pro-British partisanship, see Ferguson, *American Diplomacy and the Boer War,* pp. 123, 175; and Tyler Dennett, *John Hay: From Poetry to Politics* (New York, 1933), p. 246.

[15]Hay to White, 24 September 1899, William R. Thayer, *The Life and Letters of John Hay,* 2 vols. (Boston and New York, 1915), 2:221; Hay to White, 18 March 1900, White Papers. Hay, a notorious anglophile as well as an Anglo-Saxonist, had once described Britain and the United States as being "joint ministers of the same sacred mission of liberty and progress, charged with duties which we cannot evade by the imposition of irresistible hands." Address at Lord Mayor's Banquet, Easter, 1898. John Hay, *Addresses* (New York, 1906), p. 79. Hay's Anglo-Saxonist view of the Boer War is discussed in Clymer, *Hay,* pp. 157–66.

[16]Hollis speech at Boston reported in *Times* (London), 3 March 1899, p. 5. Rhodes's letter in *New York Tribune,* 11 February 1900, pt. 3, p. 3. George F. Becker, "Rights and Wrongs in South Africa," *Forum* 29 (March 1900): 36.

[17]Address before the New York Chamber of Commerce, 21 November 1899, draft in Whitelaw Reid Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The *Tribune*'s editorial policy, of course, reflected Reid's view. See, for example, the editorials of 29 November 1899, p. 6, and 21 December 1899, p. 6.

well as a Boer side to the Transvaal controversy." Mahan feared that unsavory elements in the American populace (primarily Irishmen, Germans, and Democrats) would take advantage of widespread sympathy for the Boers to try to disrupt the Anglo-American understanding. Mahan thought it would be a calamity if they succeeded. He told Henry Cabot Lodge, the senator from Massachusetts who was both his friend and a student of his ideas about American foreign policy, that he, Mahan, had no sympathy at all for the Boers. He believed they had provoked the war by attempting to impose the supremacy of "the Dutch race" in South Africa. "This the British, both at home & abroad, were determined not to have."[18]

Most of Britain's supporters in the United States pointedly differentiated British and Boer racial characteristics. (The notable exception was Theodore Roosevelt, who, as a Dutchman himself, had to believe that the Boers "down at bottom have the great basic virtues of the Teutonic races.")[19] Those who could not justify labeling the Boers as innate racial inferiors still found it easy to accuse them of backwardness and cultural inferiority. Their stubborn resistance to the modernizing tendencies introduced into South Africa by British settlers proved that they were "out of touch with the civilization of the modern world," said the *New York Times.* Most other organs of the New York press pictured the Boers—with some degree of accuracy—as a people who had scarcely advanced beyond the seventeenth century. Their social structure was patriarchal and oppressive; their economy was pastoral and stagnant; their religion had not changed since the days of John Calvin; and they treated black Africans as little better than slaves. "In this Transvaal war," said one New Yorker in a letter to E. L. Godkin, editor of the *Nation,* "Britain stands for freedom and civilization; the Boer 'Republic' represents the barbarism and the despotism that are a survival of the dark ages." South Africa badly needed civilizing by Anglo-Saxons.[20]

Some supporters of the British cause went much further in denouncing Boer backwardness. President Benjamin Ide Wheeler of the University of California declared that "the claim of local barbarism based on squatter sovereignty is likely to be recognised neither for the American

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[18]Mahan to Lodge, 8 December 1900, Henry Cabot Lodge Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts (hereafter cited as Lodge Papers); Mahan to Reid, 20 October 1899, Royal Cortissoz, *The Life of Whitelaw Reid,* 2 vols. (London, 1921), 2:269–70. See also Mahan to James R. Thursfield, 28 October 1899 and 15 December 1899, and to James Ford Rhodes, 30 January 1900, Robert Seager II and Doris D. Maguire, eds., *Letters and Papers of Alfred Thayer Mahan,* 3 vols. (Annapolis, Md., 1975), 2:664–65, 674, 679–80 (hereafter cited as *Mahan Letters*); and Mahan, "The Merits of the Transvaal Dispute," *North American Review* 170 (March 1900): 325.

[19]Roosevelt to John St. Loe Strachey, 27 January 1900, *Roosevelt Letters,* 2:1144.

[20]*New York Times,* 8 September 1899, p. 6. See also editorial, ibid., 5 September 1899, p. 6. Zeil, "United States and the Boer War," pp. 18–19, 23, 25, quotes extensively from the New York press. Alfred Swan to Godkin, 21 May 1900, *Nation* 70 (May 1900): 396.

Indian and Zulu, nor for Mormon or Boer." A writer in the *Arena* depicted the Boers as ignorant, dogmatic, slovenly, and unsociable, and went on to describe the war as a "race war" between industrious and progressive Anglo-Saxons and "a race in direct and arid opposition to the advancement of civilization." By resisting progress, the Boers had forfeited any right to political independence.[21]

Believing as they did that civilization and the interests of the entire Anglo-Saxon race were wrapped up in the British war effort, American supporters of Britain were horrified at the terrible defeats inflicted on the British forces in December 1899. During the period known as "Black Week" (10–15 December)—the most disastrous week for British arms in the nineteenth century—an ill-conceived frontal assault by British infantry at Magersfontein resulted in a frightful slaughter; General William Gatacre, advancing with a second British column, was routed at Stormberg; and the incompetent General Sir Redvers Buller, leading a relief force toward the encircled garrison at Ladysmith, was repulsed at the Tugela River with heavy losses.

John Hay was appalled at these developments, particularly since the Boer victories greatly increased pro-Boer sympathy in the United States. "A smashing victory would quiet everything considerably," he wrote to Ambassador Joseph Choate in London, "but I gravely fear the effect of another British defeat." Hay was also concerned that the English branch of the race had "lost all skill in fighting" and was becoming decadent. If this was so, he said, it was "a portentous fact," since British power "on the whole made for peace and civilization."[22]

Other influential Americans were equally dismayed at the events of December. Henry Cabot Lodge, one of the most powerful Republicans on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and an implacable defender of the administration's policy, laid the blame for the British defeats on "the fact that they have been whipping hill tribes and Dervishes for so long that they have forgotten how white men fight." He feared that the Continental powers would now intervene with the purpose of destroying the British Empire, a

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[21]Wheeler quoted in H. H. Bowen, "American Public Opinion of the War," *Nineteenth Century* 47 (May 1900): 745. Johannes Hrolf Wisby, "The South African War of Races," *Arena* 23 (May 1900): 476, 479. See also Edward J. Hodgson, "An American View of the Boer War," *Nineteenth Century* 48 (August 1900): 279–82; Becker, "Rights and Wrongs in South Africa," p. 36; Henry Cust, "The Dutch in South Africa," *North American Review* 170 (February 1900): 198–211, passim; and George Lacy, "Some Boer Characteristics," ibid. 170 (January 1900): 43–53, passim. Andrew Carnegie published a rebuttal to the Boer-inferiority arguments, saying the Boers were as civilized as the British, and that the latter had committed a serious error in fomenting a "racial war" in South Africa. Carnegie, "The South African Question," ibid. 169 (December 1899): 801–4.

[22]Hay to Choate, 3 January 1900, Hay Papers; Hay to Henry Adams, 15 June 1900, ibid.

development that "no rational American" could see as anything but a catastrophe.[23]

Mahan and Roosevelt also dreaded European intervention in the conflict while Britain was down. Such intervention and British defeat, they agreed, would be a terrible blow to the Anglo-Saxon race and all it stood for. Mahan hurried off a letter to his friend James R. Thursfield, a British naval historian and a journalist on the staff of the London *Times,* saying, "I cannot express with what deep sorrow and anxiety your checks affect me. . . . But I cannot believe God will permit so beneficent a government to be permanently disabled."[24] Roosevelt, like John Hay, worried that the "lack of fighting edge in the British soldier" meant that the British had grown decadent. He admired the Boers for their military prowess, but "the frenzy of England's continental critics" in the wake of Black Week strengthened his conviction that the interests of the entire "English-speaking race" were threatened. "I should very strongly favor this country taking a hand in the game if the European continent selected this opportunity to try to smash the British Empire," he said. "Real liberty and real progress are bound up with the prosperity of the English-speaking peoples."[25]

Hay, Lodge, Mahan, and Roosevelt were in the minority in the United States in deploring Britain's ill fortune, but quite a few of their countrymen agreed with them. The New York *Mail and Express* said that "if Anglo-Saxon power and resourcefulness" had been on trial during the Spanish-American War, "they are today on trial to a greater degree." *Harper's Weekly* cautioned Americans not to "lose sight of the stupendous fact that British prestige is in mortal danger; nor can we fail, if we have a

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[23]Lodge to Theodore Roosevelt, 16 December 1899 and 2 February 1900, Henry Cabot Lodge, ed., *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884–1918,* 2 vols. (New York and London, 1925), 1:429, 446. See also Henry White to Lodge, 9 February 1900, Lodge Papers.

[24]Mahan to Thursfield, 15 December 1899, *Mahan Letters,* 2:674. See also Mahan's letter to the editor, *New York Times,* 22 January 1900, p. 6.

[25]Roosevelt to John R. Proctor, 23 December 1899, Roosevelt Papers. In a letter to Arthur Lee, 19 December 1899, Roosevelt had earlier expressed his support for American intervention if Europe attacked Great Britain; quoted in David H. Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt and His English Correspondents: A Special Relationship of Friends* (Philadelphia, 1973), p. 28. His concern about British decadence was expressed in a letter to Anna Roosevelt Cowles, 17 December 1899, Anna Roosevelt Cowles, ed., *Letters from Theodore Roosevelt to Anna Roosevelt Cowles, 1870–1918* (New York and London, 1924), p. 226 (hereafter cited as *Roosevelt-Cowles Letters*). On the latter point, see also Roosevelt to Spring Rice, 12 March 1900, *Spring Rice Letters,* 1:317. His increased admiration for the Boers is evident in Roosevelt to Walter G. Cumming, 27 January 1900, *Roosevelt Letters,* 2:1143. Roosevelt was also concerned that the collapse of the British Empire would lead to European advances in the New World and a military challenge to the Monroe Doctrine. See Roosevelt to Elihu Root, 29 January 1900, Elihu Root Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

proper pride of race, or a decent sense of gratitude, or a consciousness of what the English have accomplished in the homes of the savage races, to mourn over these disasters." Godkin's *Nation* published a letter from a retired American journalist living in London, deploring the fact that "probably not one in ten of our people sees far enough into the future of civilization to understand that the prevalent influence of England rather than that of any other of the European Powers . . . would be for the benefit of the race at large. . . . They cannot, or will not, see that England, everywhere she goes, is planting industrial and human interests which are growing and ripening not only for our race, but for all races of men." Whitelaw Reid told readers of the *Tribune* that they should hope for a quick recovery of British fortunes and the defeat of the Boers so that Anglo-Saxon civilization might "more and more prevail throughout the earth."[26] Mark Twain, who was in England, wrote home to William Dean Howells that even though he had believed for some time that British actions in South Africa were "in every way shameful and excuseless," he could not now condemn the British cause:

> Every day I write (in my head) bitter magazine articles about it; but I have to stop with that. For England must not fall; it would mean an inundation of Russian and German political degradations which would envelop the globe and steep it in a sort of Middle-Age night and slavery which would last till Christ comes again. Even wrong—and she is wrong—England must be upheld. He is an enemy of the human race who shall speak against her now.[27]

The European intervention that some Americans feared never materialized, however, and during the weeks following the disastrous defeats of December, tens of thousands of British reinforcements poured into South Africa from Great Britain, India, and the dominions. In February 1900 the war entered a new phase, with overwhelmingly superior British forces (about 180,000 men compared with fewer than 50,000 Boer troops) taking the offensive. Under Lords Kitchener and Roberts, the empire's two best generals, they moved relentlessly northward, relieving the besieged garrisons and proceeding to invade the two Boer republics. "The champions of civilization have underrated the physical prowess of their neighbors, and they are now paying the penalty of their mistake," said a writer in the *North American Review* shortly after the surrender of the Boer General Cronje at Paardeberg and the relief of Ladysmith. "But their ultimate triumph cannot be doubted." Observing the determination of the British to bring the Boers

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[26]*Mail and Express,* 18 December 1899, quoted in Zeil, "United States and the Boer War," pp. 18–19; *Harper's* in *Literary Digest* 20 (January 1900): 2; W. J. Stillman to Godkin, 9 February 1900, *Nation* 70 (February 1900): 144; and editorial, *New York Tribune,* 21 December 1899, p. 6.

[27]Twain to Howells, 25 January 1900, Albert B. Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Letters,* 2 vols. (New York and London, 1917), 2:693.

to heel, the Boston *Transcript* found evidence of the "racial capability" of the Anglo-Saxons. Although the British army had suffered terrible defeats early in the war, after each defeat it had come up "in grim, set purpose to conquer." The paper concluded that "a more mercurial race might have given up its task, but the dogged courage of tenacity peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon asserted itself after every repulse, and finally won."[28]

With the British on the offensive and the Boers in full retreat, a new element became evident in American discussion of the war. Supporters of the British, taking the collapse of the Boers as proof of Boer "inferiority," began to talk of the war as a Darwinian struggle in which the "fit" Anglo-Saxon race would inevitably crush out the independence of the "unfit" Boers. "It is sad to witness a human race succumbing to the principle of the survival of the fittest," wrote one observer shortly after the British conquest and annexation of the Orange Free State; "but how much sadder would it not be to see the superior race succumb to the inferior?" According to Edwin Maxey, an authority on constitutional law, the Boers had not adapted to the liberal social and political environment of the twentieth century; and hence, like an animal species that failed to adapt to a new environment, they were doomed to defeat and possible extinction as a people. Still another interested American, Professor Washburn Hopkins of Yale, declared that the evolutionary principles being manifested in South Africa constituted a "higher morality" than the international morality appealed to by Boer sympathizers:

> Is there not here a counterpart in the moral world to the inflexible severity of physical laws, whereby the maintenance of the race is upheld at the sacrifice of individuals? In the end, as far as man is concerned, the survival of the fittest is the success of the most civilized, or of those who potentially at least represent humanity's progress. . . . Therefore Spain bends to America, for ours is the right of way by the higher law of racial superiority.

"So, whether just or unjust, by the foot-rule of man's code," Hopkins concluded, "England's battle in Africa is in effect a moral struggle in behalf of the human race."[29]

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[28]Thomas C. Hutten, "The Doom of the Boer Oligarchies. A Netherlander's View o the South African Problem," *North American Review* 170 (March 1900): 331; *Public Opinion* 28 (March 1900): 299.

[29]Washburn Hopkins, "England and the Higher Morality," *Forum* 28 (January 1900): 569–70; Wisby, "South African War of Races," p. 479; and Edwin Maxey, "The Race Supremacy Question in South Africa," in Maxey, *Some Questions of Larger Politics* (New York, 1901), pp. 23–24. See also *Literary Digest* 20 (January 1900): 42; Bowen, "American Opinion of the War," p. 744; and the editorials in the *New York Times,* 5 September 1899, p. 6, and 8 September 1899, p. 6. Albert Shaw, the Anglo-Saxonist editor of the *American Review of Reviews,* had set forth a somewhat similar view of the Anglo-Boer controversy more than three years before the war began. See Shaw, "Empire-Building in South Africa," *Cosmopolitan* 20 (March 1896): 480.

Captain Mahan was one of those who perceived in the British advance the triumph of a race inherently superior to its opponent. Mahan was determined to do what he could to counteract the pro-Boer sentiments of the majority of Americans, and hence he conscientiously used his literary gifts to influence what he called "the class that thinks understandingly, and most shapes that formless thing we call public opinion."[30] Mahan reacted angrily in late January 1900 to a statement by Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts comparing the struggle of the Boers to the defense of Thermopylae by Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans. Mahan published a reply in the *Independent* in which he asserted that the Boers and the Spartans had only one thing in common—both were governed by corrupt and oppressive oligarchies. He then went on to argue that the Boers suffered from unfitness for modern conditions; the events of the recent past proved once and for all that the continued existence of the Boer republics was inconsistent with the general welfare of humanity and civilization. South Africa, Mahan concluded, must henceforth be subject to English traditions of liberty and law—traditions that had again proved their inherent fitness to survive.[31]

While Anglo-Saxonists like Mahan tried to explain and justify the new turn of events in South Africa through the use of Darwinian terminology, several prominent persons in England sought to bring their case before the American public by writing articles for the generally pro-British *North American Review.* In nearly every instance, they appealed for support on grounds of the supposed racial affinity of Britons and Americans and the superiority of Anglo-Saxon culture. The Marquis of Lorne, pointing out that "the nations that have no Anglo-Saxon stock . . . are all against us," asserted that Great Britain was "compelled" to pursue a policy of domination in South Africa; otherwise, the Uitlanders in the Boer republics would be denied the free institutions and superior civilization that were their birthrights as Anglo-Saxons. Similarly, Mary Endicott Chamberlain, the American wife of Britain's secretary of state for the colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, reminded her countrymen that the Anglo-Saxon race bore "the responsibility for the civilization and welfare of the vast populations which turn to the English-speaking people for protection and good

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[30]Mahan to Seth Low, 28 March 1900, *Mahan Letters,* 2:685. See also Mahan to Leopold J. Maxse (editor of the *National Review*), 9 December 1901, ibid., 2:736. In late 1900 Mahan published an account of the war which was based wholly on British sources and very biased. *The Story of the War in South Africa, 1899–1900* (London, 1900).

[31]Mahan, "The Transvaal and the Philippines," *Independent* 52 (February 1900): 289–91. See also Mahan to James R. Thursfield, 15 December 1899, *Mahan Letters,* 2:674; and Mahan, "The Influence of the South African War upon the Prestige of the British Empire," *National Review* 38 (December 1901): 511. Senator Hoar's statement was contained in a letter read to a mass meeting at Boston on 17 January in support of the Boers. W. D. Puleston, *Mahan: The Life and Work of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, U.S.N.* (New Haven, 1939), p. 220.

government." Although Mrs. Chamberlain did not mention them specifically, she probably had in mind, among others, the black people of South Africa who had suffered at the hands of the Boers. Yet another observer in England believed that most Americans realized "that it was better for the world at large that England should succeed." And late in the year 1900, Lord Charles Beresford, a Royal Navy rear-admiral, assured readers of the *Review* that once the Boers had given up the struggle and been introduced to the advantages of Anglo-Saxon education and civil freedom, they would become "in their turn sturdy defenders of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, were the whole force of the Old World oligarchies to endeavor to stifle the progressive Anglo-Saxon race."[32]

John Hay did not have to be prodded with such appeals to rejoice at the steady advance of the British armies in South Africa. The Dutch minister, Baron Gevers, was greatly surprised one day, shortly after the British took the offensive, when he visited Secretary Hay and was greeted with the words, "At last we have had a success." When Gevers asked Hay in what field the United States had scored a success, the embarrassed secretary of state had to admit that he was referring to the British success in South Africa.[33] In mid-March, Hay wrote to Henry White that he hoped the British would soon finish the job of subduing the Boers. He felt confident, he said, that once the war ended and the Boer republics were absorbed into the British Empire, American public opinion would soon "settle down to the conviction that this was the only issue compatible with the honor of Great Britain or with our own future interests."[34] Two months later, Secretary Hay infuriated and bewildered a three-man Boer delegation that had come to Washington to seek a mediated settlement before the British could complete the defeat of the Boer armies. The three had been extravagantly fêted on their arrival in New York City and had been escorted to Washington by a group of Democratic congressmen. Hay, however, was unimpressed. He granted them only a very brief, formal interview, during which he read them a prepared statement declaring that the policy of the United States toward the South African war was, and would continue to be, "impartial neutrality." To make things perfectly clear to the Boer envoys, as they were led from Hay's office, the British ambassador, Lord Pauncefote, was ushered in. Hay's conduct so angered

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[32]Marquis of Lorne, "Realities of the South African War," *North American Review* 170 (March 1900): 304–8 (quotations from pp. 305, 304); Mary Endicott Chamberlain, "An Obligation of Empire," ibid., 170 (April 1900): 503; Sydney Brooks, "America and the War," ibid. 170 (March 1900): 346; and Charles Beresford, "The Future of the Anglo-Saxon Race," ibid. 171 (December 1900): 804. For racial appeals from British and Canadian newspapers, see *Literary Digest* 20 (February 1900): 222.

[33]Memorandum of conversation between Count Quadt, the German chargé at Washington, and Baron Gevers, 9 November 1900, quoted in Dennett, *Hay,* p. 386.

[34]Hay to White, 18 March 1900, White Papers.

the Boers that they spent several weeks thereafter touring the United States, denouncing the McKinley administration.[35]

Theodore Roosevelt greeted the British advance with a combination of regret and hope. He regretted that "the representatives of two such splendid races" should still be killing each other; but he hoped that the British would now bring the war to a successful conclusion and get on with the task of establishing "a great English-speaking commonwealth south of the Zambesi."[36]

Roosevelt's opinion of the Boers was higher than ever during the period of the British offensive. Always an admirer of military skill and courage, he had decided that the early Boer successes on the battlefield proved conclusively that despite their "uncouthness and surface unattractiveness," the Boers possessed "at bottom the same qualities that the English and Scotch, Scandinavians, Netherlanders and Germans all have."[37] He had also concluded that both sides in the conflict, Briton and Boer, were, from their different standpoints, in the right. The Boers were perfectly justified in fighting for total political independence from the British Empire. The British, on the other hand, had a perfect right to demand equal treatment for British settlers in the Boer republics and to try to insure the security of their South African colonies and the Cape route by bringing the Boers into line. Roosevelt was made melancholy by the thought that two superior peoples, each of them with a good cause, should have to fight one another.[38]

His opinion held firm, however, that the advance of civilization depended on a British victory. He thought both sides would benefit from such a result. A British-controlled South Africa would lead to a fusion of the British and Dutch populations, such as had occurred two hundred and fifty years earlier between his own Dutch ancestors and the English in the colony of New York. The Boers would fall heir to the "freedom and order and material and moral prosperity" that characterized the civilization of the English-speaking peoples. And the English-speaking race as a whole

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[35]For a complete account of the Boer mission, see Ferguson, *American Diplomacy and the Boer War,* pp. 143–56. Henry White had warned Hay back in December that the Boers were planning to send a mission to the United States to bring pressure on the administration. White to Hay, 28 December 1899, White Papers. On the Boer strategy, see Montagu White (chief Boer agent in the United States) to F. C. Selous, 6 March 1900, Roosevelt Papers.

[36]Roosevelt to Walter G. Cumming, 27 January 1900, *Roosevelt Letters,* 2:1143; Roosevelt to Spring Rice, 16 March 1901, *Spring Rice Letters,* 1:344.

[37]Roosevelt to John St. Loe Strachey, 27 January 1900, and to Cecil Spring Rice, same date, *Roosevelt Letters,* 2:1144, 1146. In the Strachey letter, Roosevelt pointed out that many men in the Boer ranks had the same names as some of his own ancestors. He believed he was probably a distant relative of these men.

[38]Roosevelt to Anna Roosevelt Cowles, 2 February and 5 February 1900, *Roosevelt-Cowles Letters,* pp. 234, 235; David H. Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt: Confident Imperialist* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 162.

would benefit from the infusion of Boer blood and the addition of South Africa to its worldwide domain. Finally, Roosevelt believed that British domination of South Africa and the fusion of British and Boer peoples would help insure that "the twentieth century will still be the century of the men who speak English." The civilization of the world would gain enormously from the continued supremacy of the English-speaking race.[39]

Unfortunately, Roosevelt's hope for a quick conclusion to the war, "to avoid bloodshed and leave as little rancor as may be behind," was not fully realized.[40] British forces entered Pretoria in June 1900, and less than two months later the last Transvaal army was defeated in the eastern part of the republic. President Paul Kruger fled to Holland, and Lord Roberts formally annexed the Transvaal to the Crown. For almost two years after the annexation of the Transvaal, however, mobile units of Boer commandos carried on a protracted and painful guerrilla war in South Africa.

The Boers' refusal to surrender after their evident defeat meant that the administration's South African policy was bound to be an issue in the upcoming American political campaign. William Jennings Bryan, the acknowledged leader of the Democratic party, had begun appealing to pro-Boer sentiment among the voters as early as January 1900, attacking the British on the one hand and the policy of McKinley and Hay on the other. Most of the Democratic state conventions that met in the spring to elect delegates to the national convention adopted resolutions in support of the Boers. And as expected, when the Democrats assembled at Kansas City in July to put together a platform and nominate Bryan, they made much of the Boers' continuing struggle for independence. Applause greeted every mention of the Boers, and the platform adopted by the convention not only extended the party's sympathy to "the heroic burghers," but denounced "the ill-concealed Republican alliance with England."[41]

Many prominent Republicans were concerned lest the war issue damage McKinley's reelection prospects, and a number of Republican convention delegates announced their intention to work for a pro-Boer plank in their own party's platform. Secretary Hay, disgusted at the continuing uproar over the issue and at Bryan's pronouncements in favor of the Boers, wrote to his friend Henry Adams on 15 June, just four days before the Republican convention was due to meet at Philadelphia: "I have

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[39]Roosevelt to F. C. Selous, 7 February 1900, *Roosevelt Letters,* 2:1176; Roosevelt to Spring Rice, 16 March 1901, *Spring Rice Letters,* 1:345. Roosevelt also drew the hopeful comparison between New York's past and South Africa's future in letters to Spring Rice, 2 December 1899, and to Walter G. Cumming and John St. Loe Strachey, both dated 27 January 1900. Ibid., 1:305; *Roosevelt Letters,* 2:1143, 1144. See also Roosevelt to A. J. Sage, 9 March 1900, and to F. C. Selous, 19 March 1900, ibid., 2:1214–15, 1234–35.

[40]Roosevelt to George F. Becker, 6 February 1900, Roosevelt Papers.

[41]Donald B. Johnson and Kirk H. Porter, comps., *National Party Platforms, 1840–1972* (Urbana, Ill., 1973), p. 115. Ferguson, *American Diplomacy and the Boer War,* pp. 192–98, offers a good treatment of the war as a campaign issue.

the greatest admiration for the Boers' smartness, but it is their bravery that our idiotic public is snivelling over. If they were only as brave as they are slim, the war would have ended long ago by their extermination. . . . Your friend Bryan, ass that he is, says that the Boer War is an issue in our campaign—I suppose because the British are 16 to 1."[42]

On the very day that the Republican convention was gaveled to order, Joseph Chamberlain, the colonial secretary who had long been an advocate of Anglo-American cooperation in world affairs, delivered a speech in London that was clearly meant to be heard in Washington and Philadelphia. Addressing the Women's Liberal Unionist Association, Chamberlain said that Britain expected Europe to be hostile to its efforts in South Africa. "But," he continued, "there are quarters whence even a note of disapproval would be a matter of serious concern." Two years before, when the United States was at war with Spain, the British had not entered into "quizzical disquisitions or technical discussions, but recognized that they [the Americans] were carrying out as Anglo-Saxons a great work of civilization and humanity." Now Great Britain was engaged in a similar task in South Africa, Chamberlain said, and the British people asked the people of the United States to see their action in the same light; "and we believe that in the long run we shall gain the final seal of their approval."[43]

Chamberlain's words probably strengthened the determination of administration forces at the Republican convention not to allow a pro-Boer plank into the platform. After a difficult fight, they succeeded in getting the convention to adopt an ambiguous plank that commended the president for past efforts on behalf of peace; reaffirmed the principle of nonintervention in European controversies; and expressed an earnest hope that in South Africa, "a way may soon be found, honorable alike to both contending parties, to terminate the strife between them."[44]

As it turned out, the Boer issue probably had very little effect on the outcome of the election, primarily because most of the American public had accepted a British victory as inevitable. Bryan made some gains in areas of the country with large German populations, but McKinley, stressing national prosperity, was easily reelected. Furthermore, of the fourteen senators who stood for reelection in 1900 after supporting pro-Boer resolutions in the Senate, nine were defeated. Clearly, by the fall of 1900, most voters had lost interest in the war.

With the point of view of the country's partisans of Britain having survived the test of the election, the United States remained consistently pro-British in its diplomatic stance for the remainder of the war—hardly a surprising development in light of the fact that those two ardent Anglo-Saxonists, John Hay and Theodore Roosevelt, ran American foreign

[42]Hay to Adams, 15 June 1900, Hay Papers.
[43]*New York Tribune,* 20 June 1900, pt. 1, p. 9.
[44]Johnson and Porter, *Party Platforms,* p. 124.

policy in 1901–02. Roosevelt clung to his hope for a great English-speaking commonwealth south of the Zambesi and Hay continued to be motivated by his conviction that Britain's cause was the cause of all Anglo-Saxons. Hay's actions continued to reflect his bias. He made known to the exiled President Kruger that he would be unwelcome in the United States, and he made it very clear that the United States "could not possibly" use its good offices to bring the two parties to the conference table. In February 1902 he answered widespread complaints about the concentration camps the British had established in South Africa by asserting: "The Boer women and children are in the Concentration Camps simply because their husbands and brothers want them there, and as to the war with all its hideous incidents and barbarities, it will stop the instant [the Boer Generals] Botha and deWet wish it to stop."[45]

The war did stop about three months later, on 31 May 1902, when British and Boer representatives signed the Peace of Vereeniging. The Boers accepted British sovereignty, and the British in turn gave guarantees that the Boers would enjoy self-government in the not-too-distant future. Theodore Roosevelt welcomed the end of the war with a final wish that the people of South Africa might become "a very valuable addition to the English-speaking stock throughout the world."[46] As for John Hay, he was proud of his efforts on behalf of the British cause. In 1903 the mayor of Dunedin, New Zealand, sent him a number of gifts and testimonials that had originally been intended for Hay's son, Adelbert, who had served as United States consul at Pretoria in 1900 and had performed valuable services there for British and dominion (including New Zealander) prisoners of war. Adelbert had been accidentally killed in a fall shortly after his return to the United States, and hence the tokens of appreciation from New Zealand were sent to his father. In his reply to the mayor of Dunedin, Hay said he was grateful that in the short span of life allotted to his son, "he was able to do something to testify to the sentiments of sympathy and friendship which unite all branches of the English-speaking race, however widely separated they may be."[47] It was just such sentiments that had helped motivate John Hay's policy toward the Boer War for over two and a half years.

There can be little doubt that the Anglo-Saxonist convictions of John Hay and those who thought like him were a major determinant of American policy during the Boer War. Hay's actions were obviously influenced by his

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[45]Hay to Stanford Newel (United States minister at The Hague), 3 December 1900, Hay Papers; Hay to Henry Cabot Lodge, 19 February 1902, ibid.

[46]Roosevelt to John St. Loe Strachey, 18 July 1902, quoted in Burton, *Roosevelt and His English Correspondents,* p. 39.

[47]Hay to R. Chisholm, 10 July 1903, Hay Papers. On Adelbert Hay's consulship, which was widely interpreted at the time as another sign of the pro-British attitude of the United States government, see Ferguson, *American Diplomacy and the Boer War,* pp. 113–20.

faith in the superior virtues of Anglo-Saxon civilization. Theodore Roosevelt based his support for the British primarily on racial considerations. Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose opinions on foreign policy matters carried great weight in the United States, devoted himself throughout the war to counteracting public sympathy for the Boers and promoting what he termed "the cause of the English speaking peoples & their common tradition."[48]

Nor were Hay, Roosevelt, and Mahan alone in citing Anglo-Saxon race sentiment as the justification for a pro-British policy. A substantial number of influential and articulate Americans, frequently citing Anglo-Saxon superiority and Anglo-American racial affinity, threw their support behind a policy that gave material aid and moral comfort to Great Britain. The support of these people was a very important development, for it meant that the pro-Boer sympathies of the majority were tempered by what Roosevelt called "a very strong friendly feeling toward England."[49] This friendly feeling in turn helped make the government's policy politically feasible in the face of hostile majority opinion.

The budding Anglo-American rapprochement thus survived a stiff test during the Boer War. Had important members of the foreign policy community been less devoted to Anglo-Saxonism, they might have been more attentive to the opinions of the Boers' supporters and more benevolent toward the Boer cause. Such a course could have revived old antagonisms and wrecked the growing British-American understanding. As it was, however, Anglo-Saxonism prevailed. "One has only to imagine the tornado of invective that would have whirled over the country had the Boer War broken out five years ago to gauge how far America has travelled from the point of view which made the Venezuelan outburst possible," said a British observer in 1900, recalling the boundary dispute that had momentarily aroused such passions in the United States in 1895.[50] The people of Great Britain, while unhappy at the support for the Boers evident in American public opinion, much appreciated the expressions of friendship by the pro-British minority and the decidedly friendly attitude of the United States government. The war in South Africa brought no serious deterioration in Anglo-American relations.

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[48]Mahan to Leopold J. Maxse, 9 December 1901, *Mahan Letters,* 2:736.

[49]Roosevelt to Henry White, 23 November 1900, *Roosevelt Letters,* 2:1437. For an entertaining account of the divisions in American opinion, see Byron Farwell, "Taking Sides in the Boer War," *American Heritage* 27 (April 1976): 21–25, 92–97.

[50]Brooks, "America and the War," p. 347.